



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together

General Election | 2020

Chambers Ireland Manifesto

Places Matter

Introduction

“Place Making” must be at the heart of a new Programme for Government. By emphasising the importance of place in how we work and do business, we are more likely to create a sustainable, balanced, and progressive economy.

Although unemployment is at its lowest level since the Celtic Tiger and job creation is at an all-time high, this prosperity is not being felt in all parts of the country. Underinvestment in infrastructure, particularly housing, has become a threat to our competitiveness and to the overall sustainability of our economic recovery. The shortage of affordable, appropriate housing impacts employees and employers, having negative consequences on quality of life for many.

In recent years, the consistent priority of Chambers has been the need for rapid strategic investment in infrastructure to make up for the “lost decade” following the financial crash. Ahead of General Election 2020, the message of our members remains the same: The new Government must commit to efficient delivery of key infrastructure projects from transport and housing to energy and water. Retaining the National Planning Framework and Climate Action Plan is critical to the productivity and sustainability of the Irish economy.

Ireland also faces risks arising from international trade tensions which could be devastating to an economy as open as ours. Brexit is yet to have a dramatic impact on the economy but when the UK departs the Union (particularly if it fails to negotiate a new deal) our economy will take a severe hit. Many Irish businesses will suffer, increasing job losses and depressing growth.

Creating a social and economic environment that helps the country to grow, and our people prosper will require strategic investments and innovative policies that support the delivery of infrastructure, decarbonisation, if we are to transform ourselves into to a future-focused, inclusive country.

Along with the need for improved public transport, broadband and water infrastructure, we must rapidly transition to a low-carbon economy. Our collective inaction on climate resilience measures to decarbonise our economy mean that we risk breaching our 2030 climate targets. Substantial investment is essential if we are to limit our impact on climate change. This involves making significant improvements to our energy grid, introducing a planning framework that supports offshore renewable wind energy, and financing research projects that support decarbonisation.

More productive, efficient approaches to managing our economy must be matched by sustainable, inclusive policies that support job creation in the regions. With full employment approaching, we must improve labour force participation. Supports for flexible, inclusive workplaces that are family, age and disability friendly will encourage labour activation, improving health, well-being and productivity.

In September 2019, the Chambers Ireland organisation and our network of 40 Chambers pledged our support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which reflect the spirit and objectives of our work. Our network identified the goals we believe will best advance the sustainable economic development of our cities, towns and regions across Ireland. Within our Manifesto, we have used these five Goals as a framework for how a new Government can help our towns and businesses to thrive, while making our workplaces more productive, sustainable and inclusive.

Summary Recommendations

GOAL 8 - Decent work and Economic Growth

- Supporting Entrepreneurs and SMEs
- Inclusive and Accommodating Workplaces
- Productivity and Skills
- Trading Across Borders
- Competitiveness and Investment

GOAL 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities

- Create a National Urban Living Initiative
- Empower Local Authorities
- Improve Transport Services
- Remove Regulatory Disincentives
- Integrate Housing Policy with Transport Policy
- Support Urbanism
- Develop a National Active Land Management Policy
- Reduce Vacancies
- Green Local Government
- Plan for the Future
- Strengthen the Regions

GOAL 9 - Industry Innovation and Infrastructure

- Finance Infrastructure Sustainably
- Planning Reform
- Secure National Grid Infrastructure
- Climate Action through Innovation
- The Digital Economy

GOAL 13 - Climate Action

- Generating Renewable Energy
- Decarbonising Heat and Transport
- Accelerating the Business Transition to the Circular Economy
- Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

GOAL 5 - Gender Equality

- Accommodating Family Friendly Workplaces
- Access to Affordable Quality Childcare
- Advancing Women in the Workplace



Goal 8

Decent Work and Economic Growth



Goal 8



Decent Work and Economic Growth

Smaller businesses feel the impacts of increases in costs and changes to regulation far more than larger companies. These small and micro businesses account for more than 99% of the Irish economy, they are the heart of our domestic economy, employing more people than any other sector.

The new Government must improve the environment for Irish business, through measures that support competitiveness and ensure that the “Think Small First” principle must become embedded in Irish policy making. Ireland’s taxation system should recognise innovators, investors and entrepreneurs as key contributors to growth, taxing them fairly.

SMEs who trade across borders need additional supports to ensure that they are appropriately diversified to prepare for Brexit, and so that they can capitalise on the trading opportunities offered by the European Union.

While for many people employment is a positive element in their lives, providing purpose and financial independence, for others, the workplace is inaccessible for a variety of reasons. Whether through the inadequate supports for those with disabilities or the fact that 98% of those with caring responsibilities are women. Investment by the State in affordable, quality childcare needs to be sustained and increased over the coming years. This must be partnered with a strategy for flexible workplaces which supports working families.

Additional funding for education, from primary to tertiary, is essential to our economic competitiveness. Any new Government must work closely with industry and employers to ensure that the correct investments are being made throughout the education system so that life-long learning is prioritised, skills gaps are addressed, and increased labour force participation is supported.

It should be as administratively easy as possible for businesses to access skills and training provision for their employees. Additionally, employers must be able to address skills gaps with the employment of migrant workers through a system that is robust and can process these requests as efficiently as possible.

Supporting Entrepreneurs and SMEs

- Incorporate the ‘Think Small First’ principle across all Government departments through implementation of the SME Test to ensure that new and existing legislation does not have unintended impacts on SMEs
- Improve conditions to enable greater access to Financial, Venture Capital and Private Equity markets to grow
- Continue to make incremental increases to the entry point to the higher rate of income tax on a multi-annual basis
- Gradually reduce the Capital Gains Tax rate of 33% so that it is in line with competitor countries
- Increase the lifetime limit of €1 million in qualifying capital gains under the Entrepreneur’s Relief to €10 million Review and simplify the reliefs which are available, such as Retirement Relief, and integrate it within a more expansive Entrepreneurs’ Relief
- Introduce a mechanism where entrepreneurs can apply for a “small business rollover”, which would support serial entrepreneurship
- Conduct further review and reform of the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) to ensure that it is accessible and user-friendly

Inclusive and Accommodating Workplaces

- Every local authority should support existing co-working and digital hubs and drive development of new regional digital hubs where they don’t exist
- Actively support SME and start-up enterprises which relocate to affordable regional locations
- Introduce a national strategy on flexible and remote working
- Establish a working group to develop a strategy to reform current workplace conditions so that practical remote and flexible working policies can be adopted by businesses of all shapes and sizes. Membership should be comprised of business, insurance industry, the HSA, unions and policy makers

- Conduct a review of existing employment legislation and health and safety legislation
- Develop a strategy on how to support age-friendly workforces and longer working life
- Develop a national strategy to support labour participation and inclusion in the workplace for people with disabilities
- Amalgamate all current supports in the Reasonable Accommodation Fund banner into one overall grant and guarantee that funding for specialised equipment is received and controlled by the employee
- Progress the strategy to introduce Auto-Enrolment in pensions

Productivity and Skills

- Increase resources, both in staff and funding, to Regional Skills Fora, in line with population, to support their efforts to address skills needs around the country
- Target investment at training for line-managers and employers on how to implement SME-friendly, agile and flexible policies in the workplace
- Continue the rollout of increased apprenticeships and traineeships
- Increase funds for targeted training in sectors like construction and hospitality
- Conduct research into the construction sector’s future skills needs
- Introduce Start-Up Visas for migrant entrepreneurs
- Increase investment in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service
- Improve the use of the National Training Fund to support in-work training and education
- Continue to support Skillnet to ensure full geographic coverage
- Commit to a review of the existing third level funding structures so that a sustainable long-term funding model can be put in place that will address the current and capital funding needs of these institutions

- Increase investment in entrepreneurship and innovation education for students in transition year
- Increase investment in career guidance at second level to ensure reduction of occupational segregation, promotion of apprenticeships and alignment with Future Jobs in the economy

Trading Across Borders

- Support the continued expansion of comprehensive SME-friendly trade agreements, particularly in Australia, New Zealand and Asia Pacific
- Publish an annual Action Plan for Trade Deals to improve SME engagement with free trade agreements which includes strategies and clear targets for SME engagement in with these new markets
- Continue to advocate for the importance of rules-based international trade and the necessity of the WTO
- Develop a trade strategy that leverages our diaspora in key markets
- Ensure financial support for viable importers and exporters of goods and services negatively impacted by Brexit
- Introduce targeted vouchers for SMEs impacted by Brexit to obtain specific advisory services that will aid them to prepare for impacts of a new trading relationship with UK
- Support the Chamber Network in providing customs training to exporters seeking to upskill in the areas of customs regulation and documentation
- Expand the current customs training programmes targeted at SMEs
- Promote the benefits and opportunities in the Digital Single Market by investing in supports for e-commerce, digital infrastructure and digital entrepreneurship

Competitiveness and Investment

- Commit to maintaining Ireland's 12.5% rate of Corporation Tax
- Lobby at EU level to maintain the status quo of EU Council unanimity on issues of taxation
- Continue to advocate a global approach when it comes to reforming international taxation, particularly for intellectual property
- Ensure ongoing investment in our legal and judicial systems to improve cost and efficiency of dispute resolution
- Increase resources to the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in our legal system
- Develop a National Aviation strategy which will consider how best to support the commercial growth of regional airports, improve access and develop new routes
- Continue to invest in state agencies, such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Failte Ireland and InterTrade Ireland
- Ensure that there is a commitment from the IDA to increase the number of visits and jobs created to meet the objectives of the NPF, RSEs and MASPs
- Publish a strategy, with appropriate funding to support SMEs that are not catered for by either EI or the LEO network
- Expand and resource the Western Development Commission to include counties that are also included in the Atlantic Economic Corridor



Goal

11



Sustainable Cities
and Communities

Goal 11



Sustainable Cities and Communities

Urban living must be central to economic policy for the new Government. They need to tackle the congestion that damages our environment, undermines our collective prosperity, and injures our quality of life. Government with Local Authorities must work to create sustainable cities, towns, and communities.

Working, liveable urban centres are fundamental to the National Planning Framework, essential to the Climate Action Plan, and vital to the domestic economy. Unfortunately, as the National Economic and Social Council has observed, “dysfunctional patterns, interactions and outcomes are hard-wired into our system of urban development, land use and housing.”

Ireland has already become an urbanised country. Creating attractive urban spaces that are enjoyable to live in will benefit everyone. For the people living there it means reduced commuting and easier access to community and public services, while clustering offers massive economic opportunities for both employers and employees.

All future development must see mixed-use zoning with dense residential areas and local active travel infrastructure that is integrated with public transport.

We must move from the approach that has resulted in the kind of sprawl that damages productivity, and instead holistically integrate our land management, planning, and public transport strategies to create urban spaces which benefit everyone.

Investing in the public urban realm has direct business benefits, improves quality of life, and enhances both welfare and health. Building healthy, active, living towns and cities creates a complementary alignment in personal, private and public interests.

In addition to investing in our towns, Government must introduce policies which help the conversion of vacant commercial properties into residential units and expand the powers of Local Authorities to put charges on, or compulsory purchase, vacant and derelict properties.

Urban Living Initiative

Create A National Urban Living Initiative

- Create an Urban Living Initiative for urban spaces across the country, focusing on the development of healthy streets as in the London model
- What is now the Living City Initiative (LCI) should be expanded to include long term vacant commercial properties built post-1915 in the cities and towns specified in the NPF and reformed to include acquisition costs of LCI qualifying properties

Empower Local Authorities

- Enact legislation that will empower and resource Local Authorities as one-stop-shops to streamline the regulatory regime for change-of-use construction projects and above-the-shop conversions which expand the availability of housing
- Renew the Derelict Sites Act 1990 to strengthen its elements to incentivise infill and brownfield construction
- Better resource Local Authorities to initiate street improvement and active travel investments
- Introduce new legislation to expand and strengthen the powers of Local Authorities to compulsory purchase vacant sites

Improve Transport Services

- Develop inter-urban and intra-urban public transport networks, and invest in the urban built environment to promote local active transport networks that extend the utility of public transport
- Amend road traffic legislation to allow Personally Powered Transporters (e-scooters)
- Invest in shared cycling schemes and cycling infrastructure

- Prioritise intercity rail transport infrastructure
- The establishment of, as EU Policy, a TEN-T corridor along the Atlantic Economic Corridor route extending from Donegal through Sligo to Kerry
- Progress the Dublin rail interconnector
- Fast-track the Cork Suburban Rail project
- Implement BusConnects projects in all the cities
- On existing rail routes, introduce high speed sections to reduce the conflict between intercity and commuter services
- Initiate feasibility studies, and cost benefit analyses – including carbon accounting – on upgrading the links between the National Development Plan growth cities through the rail network
- Proceed with the Dart extensions and develop a timeline towards developing an all-electric rail network
- Extend train lines, where suitable, to connect freight to our trading seaports

Support Urbanism

- Investment in the urban built environment to provide social and community spaces and resources, akin to those in rural areas
- Ensure that our Local Area Plans require the people-friendly pedestrian infrastructure, segregated cycleways, and rest spots that are needed to support active transit while linking our residential areas with our civic and economic centres
- Councils that run large budget surpluses should be encouraged to invest the excess in the local economy through Transport Orientated Development
- With regard to Local Property Tax, continue to implement the Thornhill Report recommendations, and provide greater transparency about where revenue is spent

- Direct Local Authorities to integrate decisions on property taxes into the general budget process, rather than the status quo where it is dealt with as a standalone item

Remove Regulatory Disincentives

- Ensure regulatory certainty around high-density and apartment planning
- Amend EPA waste licensing rules to facilitate on-site reuse
- Support co-operative property ownership projects
- Reform Fair Deal charges to make these houses available to the rental market
- Introduce a targeted, time-bound, reduction of Construction VAT for affordable high-density apartment new builds in cities

Housing Supply and Transport Orientated Development

Integrate Housing Policy with Transport Policy

- Conduct an independent review of all existing housing policies without discontinuing the supports that are currently in place
- The Government must commit to the principles and objectives of the National Planning Framework and integrate it with the Climate Action Plan, applying the revised EU Commission definitions of Green investment, and the 'Green Golden Rule' accounting measures
- Ensure that Transport Orientated Development principles form the core of all new developments, the MetroLink Project offers a great opportunity develop expertise in this area

- Prioritise traffic reduction measures in all our towns and cities while expanding local active travel and public transport options
- Develop a National Active Land Management Policy
- Finalise and enact the legislative framework for the Land Development Agency (LDA) which allows it active land management powers
- Building upon the National Planning Framework and the Climate Action Plan There needs to be co-ordinated efforts at the regional level to integrate development, land management and investment in public transport.
- Ensure that the LDA has compulsory purchase order powers in line with the Kenny report, support this with a referendum if necessary

Reduce Vacancies

- Modernisation of the land registry to facilitate the creation of a national vacant land registry
- Implement a strengthened vacant land levy which acts as a charge on the land regardless of the ownership
- Reform of the planning system to ensure efficient decision making, in combination with the upskilling of Local Authority planning departments to allow for consistent and integrated decision making across the regions
- Having reviewed the vacancy rates, the Department of housing should set vacancy reduction targets for Local Authorities at the Electoral District level

Local Authority Reform

Green Local Government

- Allocate more funding for Local Authority energy agencies to support communities and business to become more sustainable in their energy use
- Modernise waste management systems
- Introduce a recycling deposit system
- Implement training programmes for councillors to help them align Local Economic and Community Plans and Local Area Plans with the “European Green Deal” to ensure access to EU funding
- Introduce both a green and a social sustainability component to the Procurement process to assist Local Authorities to better judge the merits of tenders.

Plan for the Future

- Strengthen and resource the planning professionals in the Local Authorities and other relevant agencies
- Create guidelines on how Local Authorities apply construction duties and levies to ensure consistency across regions and using rebates of levies and charges to ensure completion of high-density developments
- Introduce targeted reductions in construction duties and levies for developments which are coherent with the National Planning Framework
- Improve information given in the Commercial and Residential Property Price registers to facilitate proper assessment of costs per square metre

Strengthen the Regions

- Create a Super-Junior Ministry for North-South Cooperation which focuses on the infrastructural, economic, and regulatory impacts of government policy on border counties and Northern Ireland
- Conduct an independent review the Regional Assemblies’ Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Process with a view towards supporting the regional planning process
- Develop guidelines on transport infrastructure for the Regional Assemblies, while simultaneously reforming transport bodies so that they prioritise the regional impact of transport infrastructure and connection to their cities
- Resource the Regional Assemblies so that they can develop territorial impact assessments on central government policies, and proposed legislation, which can feed into the pre-legislative scrutiny process



Goal 9

Industry Innovation and Infrastructure

Goal 9



Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Our research agenda must align with the EU priorities to benefit from the next round of EU funding. Energy and the digital transition will be fundamental to the coming decade.

Ireland has become a world leader in the digital economy and should now cement this by becoming a world leader in appropriate, effective, and common-sense regulation of the digital sector. This could offer us exceptional opportunities on the world stage if we are responsible guardians of the sensitive data of other nations, if we are not responsible we risk other nations erecting digital borders so that they can protect their national and citizens' interests.

In contrast, on the environment, Ireland is a laggard. Our infrastructure holds us back and has launched the country down an unproductive pathway that damages our competitiveness and make it harder to attract Foreign Direct Investment, to find skills, and to retain employees.

The next Government must tackle our enormous infrastructure deficit and simultaneously manage our transition to a sustainable economy. Our national infrastructure is at or beyond capacity, but fortunately the European Green Deal, and sustainable financing, offer us a path back towards an efficient and sustainable economy.

Ireland is uniquely placed to benefit from this transition. We have ample renewable energy resources, we are not economically depending on high CO₂ emission industries, and we have a young highly-skilled, English-speaking population that can adapt – a population that also wants to adapt.

The projects we need, around public transport, water treatment, and renewable energies are all aligned with the EU Commissions agenda making finance increasingly accessible and proposed 'Green Golden Rule' will require us to not only measure the cost of individual projects but also provides mechanisms to account for the costs of not taking climate change mitigation actions.

Our transport, energy, and waste networks need investment to facilitate high-density housing, and our local authorities must take their role in making our cities and towns attractive and healthy places to live seriously. The coming government must put building that better Ireland at the top of their agenda.

The delivery of investment in infrastructure is essential if we are to be able to complete the body of work that the National Planning Framework, and that the transition to a low-carbon economy, requires.

Delivery of Infrastructure

Finance Infrastructure Sustainably

- Maintain the “Rainy Day Fund” with the transfer of above profile corporate tax receipts that can be used for funding capital infrastructure in the event of an economic downturn
- Optimise investment in capital projects and infrastructure, ensuring transparency, and open approach to infrastructure funding models such as PPP, to ensure progress is maintained
- Improve reporting requirements for all large projects and programmes
- Prioritise infrastructure which aligns with the National Planning Framework, multi-modal, and Transport Orientated Development principles
- Ensure that all critical infrastructure investment with the EU Commissions ‘Green Golden Rule’ proposals, and its ‘Sustainable Finance’ definitions
- Move away from the Public Works’ standard form contract towards international best practice alternatives

Planning Reform

- Streamline the planning regime to reduce uncertainty for key infrastructure investment
- Make greater use of Regional Assemblies and their ability to create strategic master plans by increasing their internal resources to allow them to offer high-skilled expert planning services to local authorities, and to guide the integration of Local Area Plans with regional and national infrastructure.

Securing National Grid Infrastructure

- Upgrade our electricity network to provide for long-term energy security by increasing investment in the electricity grid
- Provide additional resources to connect renewable supplies to the network
- Rapid rollout of the legislation that will facilitate offshore windfarms

- Invest in the accelerated roll-out of a national fast-charging network for the EVs with a focus on regional areas, while providing for public transport in urban settings
- Future proof the National Gas Grid by investing in biomethane technologies and systems to provide renewable methane and hydrogen supply
- Ensure that high-speed internet access becomes available nationwide
- Ensure there is additional investment for water infrastructure, providing powers to state bodies to finance such investment through land value capture

Supporting Research and Innovation

Climate Action through Innovation

- Invest in research into innovative technologies such as Carbon Capture Storage
- Create a national strategy that supports the decarbonisation of agriculture, like sustainable Anaerobic Digestion
- Support research into using Hydrogen gas as a fuel, and as a means of storing excess electricity

The Digital Economy

- We need to see common sense, risk-reducing, and reliable regulation in the area of digital economy that will both protect innovation over the long run and withstand the scrutiny that inevitably arises when the data of other nations’ citizens are processed in Ireland.
- Create a civilian cybersecurity agency with a multiple mandate, firstly to identify threats to ordinary residents in Ireland, state bodies, and businesses. Secondly to have a remit for penetration testing state bodies. Thirdly a mandate for informing the public, and training the business community, on how to minimise the risk to them and their property that arise from cyber security threats.



Goal 13



Climate
Action

Goal 13



Climate Action

The sustainable transition to a low carbon economy is critical to Ireland's competitiveness and our quality of life. The next Government must create a Climate Action framework that supports businesses through the transition process to a circular economy which is powered by renewable energy.

Research into dual-effect technologies like anaerobic digestion and biomethane production which reduce greenhouse gas emissions from one industry, while offsetting CO₂ emission in another, will be vital to managing this change.

To implement the National Development Plan, and the Climate Action Plan, huge investment is needed. The decarbonisation of heat and transport is vital if we are to reduce our CO₂ emissions. If we are to meet our 2030 targets and avoid significant fines, substantial investment in our electricity grid is needed.

Generating renewable energy plays a major role in the transition to a low carbon economy and is key to securing the Irish energy supply and security post-2020. It is imperative that we invest in renewable energy and remove the obstacles that hinder their development. Wind is already the second greatest source of electricity generation after natural gas but regulatory and financial barriers, such as the delay of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill, prevented us from meeting our targets and providing green renewable energy for Ireland. The decarbonisation of heat and transport will require a broad range of responses. Along with investing in the electrification of heat and transport, we must also ensure appropriate investments are made in other forms of renewable energy, such as hydrogen and biomethane, to fuel heavy good vehicles and some forms of public transport

The move towards a circular economy, with appropriate funding and infrastructure to enable businesses to make the transition, must also be a prioritised. A low-carbon, circular economy is the only sustainable future. To make this transition, we must ensure that a balanced, competitive, SME friendly approach is at the heart of regulatory changes.

Lastly, in parallel to supporting the business transition to a low carbon economy, the next Government must prioritise national climate adaptation strategies to support communities and local economies to mitigate against the more regular occurrence of extreme weather

Generating Renewable Energy

- Urgently implement a technology neutral renewable energy subsidy scheme
- Publish and enact the Marine Planning and Development Bill to provide the legal framework for delivering offshore renewable wind energy projects
- Fund research into how the gas-networks can be future proofed to transition from the delivery of natural gas to renewable gas and the potential of Hydrogen as a means of storing excess electricity
- Commit increased investment in the electricity grid to ensure that it is future-proofed and has the capacity to meet decarbonisation targets, including the progression of the North-South Interconnector and the Celtic Interconnector to ensure energy security for the island of Ireland

Decarbonising Heat and Transport

- Ringfence all Exchequer returns from Carbon Tax and strategically invest in green infrastructure, public transport, and funds that will support communities to transition to green transport and heating alternatives
- Review and expand the commitments contained in the National Development Plan of retrofitting 45,000 homes annually and bringing these houses to at least a BER of B2. Homes that use solid fuels (such as coal and peat) and those that do not have central heating must be the primary target of retrofitting
- Classify SEAI supported retrofitting projects as zero VAT rated products
- Increase investment in decarbonisation of public transport, particularly in cities, such as investment in bio-methane vehicles and the electrification of trains and buses. Road usage plans should also prioritise public transport
- Invest in appropriate infrastructure to support the transition of Heavy Goods Vehicles to low carbon fuel options like Compressed Natural Gas
- Invest in an accelerated roll-out of a national fast-charging network for EVs, particularly

in rural parts of the country where there are limited options for public transport

- Government should commit to an “Electric Vehicle first” procurement requirement for all transport unless there is a service-related justification
- Ensure that all Local Area Plans include the building of the segregated cycleways that are needed to link our residential areas with our civic and economic centres. Traffic infrastructure also needs to support, and be responsive to, the introduction of new forms of transport such as eScooters by integrating them with upgraded cycling infrastructure
- Use ring-fenced environmental fund revenues to broaden the coverage and density of shared use schemes such as City Bikes in the cities where they are available and expanding them to other towns where they are not

Accelerating the Transition to the Circular and Low Carbon Economy

- Introduce further Circular Economy supports like the recent €600,000 funding DCCA Circular Economy Call with the emphasis on the business transition
- Introduce a National CupSwap Scheme to promote the elimination of single-use coffee cups, where a standardised cup would support the flexibility of ‘grabbing a coffee on the go’ while promoting an affordable and flexible reusable alternative to single-use cups, with a central fund and regional oversight to avoid disadvantaging individual participants
- Increases in the Environmental Levy should be ringfenced to support research development and innovation and to increase the affordability of alternatives to plastics and non-renewable energies for businesses
- Increase investment into skills, apprenticeships and re-training so more people can move to jobs in the low-carbon and circular economy
- Following any phased increases to the Carbon Tax, the next Government must commit to carrying out an impact assessment on consequences for SMEs, commuters and Border communities following on from increases in carbon taxation

- Continue to invest in measures that will support communities to meet afforestation and bog restoration targets
- Expand the services offered by Local Enterprise Offices to collaborate with the business community to support actions to increase biodiversity supports such as wildflower and bee-friendly spaces in towns and cities across Ireland

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

- Prioritise appropriate budget allocation to facilitate necessary flood defence infrastructure, technology investments and support for flood resistance and resilience measures
- Government should work with the insurance industries to provide clarification on insuring properties where demountable defences have been applied
- Government should consider the merits of incentivising proactive individual flood resistance measures and flood resilience measures such as those applied via the Individual Property Protection in the UK.
- Government should consider the merits of incentivising proactive individual flood resistance measures and flood resilience measures such as those applied via the Individual Property Protection in the UK.
- Develop a National Mitigation Plan to tackle impacts of coastal erosion
- Publish a strategy to improve insurability of homes and businesses



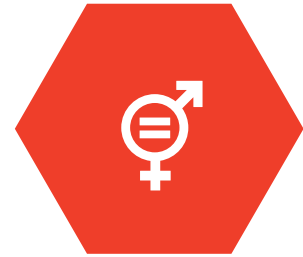
Goal

5



Gender
Equality

Goal 5



Gender Equality

Ireland must aspire to be one of the best places to work and raise families. This can only be achieved if Government takes steps to ensure equal opportunities for the genders.

Family friendly workplaces, a fairer division of caring responsibilities, affordable and accessible childcare, together with reduced occupational segregation will narrow the gender pay gap and make the goal of gender equality achievable.

While there has been a sharp and sustained increase in women's labour force participation and employment, labour market participation remains significantly lower for women than for men and continues to be lower than the EU average despite Irish women being among the most educated in Europe.

While significant progress has been made in addressing the affordability of childcare through the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme in November 2019, this investment needs to be sustained and increased over the next several years. This investment must also be partnered with a flexible workforce strategy that supports working families.

The next Government must work closely with employers to ensure that caring responsibilities are supported by the state and that there is greater equality in who carries out caring responsibilities in society. The availability of shared parental leave and flexible working arrangements has been shown to strongly mitigate the effect of caring responsibilities on women's employment outcomes, while also supporting the needs of all working parents.

The objective of growing the number of female entrepreneurs in the economy has gained significant traction in recent years, where it has been acknowledged that the promotion of women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship can be a driver of innovation, growth and jobs. Yet, it is also recognised that far fewer women run their own businesses often due to barriers that women face in starting and growing businesses. These barriers can be addressed through initiatives that address needs of female entrepreneurs.

Accommodating Family Friendly Workplaces

- Conduct a review of Paternity Benefit to better understand any obstacles for take-up
- Support parenting equality, where parental leave is reformed so that it can be shared among parents
- Currently, adoptive leave is only entitled to mothers, except in the case where a male is the sole adopter. As family structures are evolving, more inclusive policies must follow suit. Both female and male adoptive parents must be entitled to the same as those who avail of maternity and paternity leave
- Expand the existing entitlements to breastfeeding breaks in the workplace from 26 weeks to 2 years across all sectors, with the inclusion of a transition or phasing-in period ahead of the introduction

Access to Affordable Quality Childcare

- Increased and sustained investment in childcare services and early education infrastructure so that quality childcare is affordable and accessible to working parents
- Continued investment in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme
- Expand mentoring programmes like “Better Start” that aims to improve the quality of childcare and early childhood education
- The Action Plan on School Age Children, put in place to improve the provision of breakfast club/after school childcare in all parts of the country, is due for review in this year. We call on the next Government to maximise the use of schools and existing community facilities which have suitable environments available for school-age childcare where demand exists and ensure that the targets set out in this action plan are being met through regularised reporting

- The Programme of a Partnership Government 2016 committed to deliver a value-for-money cost analysis of childcare, which was not delivered. The next Programme for Government should ensure that data on the exact cost of delivery of childcare provision is published as soon as possible to ensure that further investment contributes to making childcare more affordable for parents

Advancing Women in the Workplace

- Develop practical tools and resources to assist employers to narrow the gender pay gap within their organisations
- Reduce occupational segregation by developing specific initiatives that support greater engagement with STEM and support female entrepreneurship.
- Provide additional supports to increase provision of management and leadership training to help female-led companies in scaling their business, especially for mid-level managers
- Expand the services offered by Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to offer starter office space and longer periods of mentoring, thereby allowing the LEOs the opportunity to increase tailored support for female entrepreneurs
- Increase female participation in Irish trade missions to enable female entrepreneurs to access and expand into new international markets

Questions for candidates

What reforms would you introduce to support SMEs becoming more productive and competitive?

What is your strategy to deliver more affordable housing?

What is your proposal to ensure we deliver on infrastructure commitments?

What is your strategy to decarbonise the economy and support business to transition to a circular, low carbon economy?

How will you support Irish business to maximise opportunities in the new European Green Deal?

How will you support working families and make childcare more affordable?



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